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Special Analysis

PAKISTAN:

Election Outlook

The nonparty national and provincial elections next Monday and Thursday will give President Zia another political victory. A respectable voter turnout is expected despite opposition efforts to organize a boycott, and the campaign is not likely to ignite widespread anti-Zia violence. [REDACTED]

Zia hopes the elections—the first since 1977—will permit him to claim he has restored democratic institutions. Forbidding parties to participate, he hopes, will destroy the existing party structure and end the influence of the Pakistan People's Party, the major opposition group. He fears its leaders, particularly the late Prime Minister Bhutto's daughter, Benazir, will move to avenge Bhutto if they returned to power. [REDACTED]

Zia's decision to hold elections now is a response to Army concerns that military rule has hurt its standing and diverted manpower and resources from its external security responsibilities. [REDACTED]

At the same time, the Army has insisted its interests be protected during the transition to civilian rule. Zia has sought to satisfy such concerns by retaining the presidency. He also said he will reduce the power of the Prime Minister and the National Assembly and create a National Security Council that gives the military the right to monitor the Assembly. [REDACTED]

When the main religious party, many conservatives, and even some members of the People's Party decided to participate in the elections, the opposition lost its only realistic prospect for organizing a boycott and embarrassing Zia. The government [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] seems confident it can suppress attempts to disrupt voting. [REDACTED]

Outlook

Most candidates are running for the first time, campaigning on local issues and drawing on local ties, so it will take time to determine their stance on national issues. Zia supporters, however, will be strong enough to keep the assemblies from pursuing confrontation, at least initially. [REDACTED]

Chronic regional, ethnic, and religious divisions, however, will continue encouraging the opposition and depriving Zia of the stable governing consensus he seeks. [REDACTED]

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